

**Government Administration and Elections Committee Public Hearing**  
**Testimony in Regards to: Proposed H.B. 5702, Proposed H.B. 5714, Proposed**  
**H.B. 5704, Proposed H.B. 5717, Proposed Bill H.B. 5704, Proposed Bill H.B. 5717,**  
**Proposed S.B. 389, Proposed H.B. 5087, Proposed H.B. 5133, Proposed H.B.**  
**5701, Proposed H.B. 5712, and Senate Joint Resolution No. 35**  
**March 6, 2023**

**Beck Danger Cyr (they/them)**

*MSW Candidate: Policy Practice,  
UConn School of Social Work*

**Chair Flexer, Chair Blumenthal, Vice Chair Morrin Bello, Vice Chair Slap, Ranking Member Mastrofrancesco, Ranking Member Sampson, and Distinguished Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:**

My name is Beck Danger Cyr, and I am a resident of Norwich, Connecticut. I am also a graduate student at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work, graduating this Spring with a Master's in Social Work, concentrating in Policy Practice. *I am speaking in support of several bills being discussed by the Committee, while expressing some concerns I have with some. Overall, I applaud and appreciate the Committee for taking on these important issues regarding expanding the right to vote to all whom are eligible, and looking at policy opportunities to increase voter turnout and civic engagement across the State of Connecticut.* Where I am an intern, Nancy A. Humphreys Institute for Political Social Work at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work, our mission includes increasing civic engagement and voter engagement through non-partisan efforts, based in evidence-based models that increase political participation.

Bills concerning allowing individuals incarcerated in the State of Connecticut to vote in elections:

*Proposed H.B. 5702: AN ACT ALLOWING INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS TO VOTE - **Support***

*Proposed H.B. 5714: AN ACT CONCERNING INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS AND VOTING - **Support***

Both of these bills intend to amend title nine of the Connecticut General Statutes to allow individuals whom are incarcerated in the State to become electors and vote in elections. *I strongly support these bills and believe that incarcerated individuals shall have the right to vote, and this should not be impacted as a result of being incarcerated, but sometimes currently stands as a barrier to voting.* It is crucial that we end and address felony disenfranchisement here in Connecticut, and this includes allowing incarcerated individuals to vote. I personally support this initiative without carve outs. With People of Color, particularly Men of Color being disproportionately overrepresented in Connecticut's incarcerated population, this would also address disparities and inequities in voter turnout and disenfranchisement in the context of Race. In the footnotes below, you will find a link to those incarcerated in Connecticut during the year 2020, with a breakdown of those incarcerated by State Senate and State Representative Districts.<sup>1</sup>

Studies have shown possible linkages between voting and decreases in recidivism among those with felony convictions who have reentered into their communities. This is largely due to the idea that voting and civic engagement is a "prosocial behavior," otherwise believed to be something that

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/origin/ct/2020/report.html>

communicates a sense of belonging to one's community and responsibility.<sup>2</sup> This suggests that allowing incarcerated individuals to vote may help maintain a positive connection to their community while currently being incarcerated and separated from their community. Furthermore, continuing civic and voter education may also support inmates when they are released from jail or prison. ***With this in mind, I strongly suggest adding language to these bills around mandating voter education with those currently incarcerated so that they have access to the same materials and tools as voters outside the criminal justice system, allowing them to make an informed, empowered decision.*** This education should also continue when/if they enter parole or probation, including discussing voter eligibility upon release and end of a conviction period, as justice-involved individuals often report not voting simply because they are unsure if they have had that right restored post-incarceration.<sup>3</sup>

Bills concerning mandatory and/or civic duty voting:

*Proposed Bill H.B. 5704: AN ACT CONCERNING MANDATORY VOTING - **Support with Changes***

*Proposed Bill H.B. 5717: AN ACT CONCERNING UNIVERSAL CIVIC DUTY VOTING - **Support with Changes***

When it comes to requiring all eligible electors to cast a vote in Connecticut, this is something I support with a few specifications. **Of both of these bills, despite the limited language made available for a subject matter public hearing, I believe H.B. 5704 is the stronger version of these two bills.** *As a concept, I support the idea that citizens have a civic duty and responsibility to vote. However, it is important to ensure that any implementation of this idea upon passage does not create unintended consequences, which is something I am worried about with current language available. First, it is imperative that we also acknowledge the right NOT to vote, ensuring that electors also have the option to provide a reason why they decided not to vote. Simply, I believe there should be a requirement to provide a reason why they did not vote, rather than a requirement to vote.* While we pass bills to make it easier for individuals to vote, such as no-excuse absentee voting and early voting, we should expect a higher turnout in future elections. Allowing voters to provide a reason why they decide not to vote will not only help protect the right to vote, which does statutorily include not to vote, it will also allow the State to collect data on why despite measures to increase voter turnout, why individuals still don't vote. I believe that this will help address future barriers to voting and inform the State on how to address them. I also strongly urge the Committee to add language mapping out implementation phases for educating and informing voters on this new change if enacted, so that misinformation or lack thereof can be addressed promptly. **I also strongly urge the Committee NOT to move forward with any language of a fine if voters do not vote if this bill is enacted. This is because a fine would disproportionately impact low-income voters and may neglect to consider personal emergencies or other reasons someone could not cast a ballot on or prior to election day.**

Bills concerning ranked-choice voting:

*Proposed S.B. 389: AN ACT CONCERNING RANKED-CHOICE VOTING - **Support***

*Proposed H.B. 5087: AN ACT CONCERNING RANKED-CHOICE VOTING FOR STATE AND FEDERAL OFFICES - **Support***

*Proposed H.B. 5133: AN ACT CONCERNING RANKED-CHOICE VOTING FOR MUNICIPAL OFFICES - **Support***

---

<sup>2</sup> Gerber, A. S., Huber, G. A., Meredith, M., Biggers, D. R., & Hendry, D. J. (2014). Can Incarcerated Felons Be (Re)integrated into the Political System? Results from a Field Experiment. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(4), 912–926. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12166>

<sup>3</sup> Gerber, A. S., Huber, G. A., Meredith, M., Biggers, D. R., & Hendry, D. J. (2014). Can Incarcerated Felons Be (Re)integrated into the Political System? Results from a Field Experiment. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(4), 912–926. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12166>

*Proposed H.B. 5701: AN ACT INSTITUTING RANKED-CHOICE VOTING FOR MUNICIPAL, STATE AND FEDERAL OFFICES - **Support***

*Proposed H.B. 5712: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY RANKED CHOICE VOTING IN CERTAIN ELECTIONS - **Support***

Among the five bills proposed this session pertaining to ranked-choice voting (RCV), I believe that H.B. 5701 and H.B. 5712 are the strongest ones and the ones the Committee should move forward with, as they include language that merges most of these bills into one concept. **I believe that there should be consistency in how we count and collect votes across all jurisdictions, regardless of whether it is a federal, state or municipal election.** I worry about the unintended consequences of allowing RCV in one election, and the standard process in another, especially if the election year allows multiple elections on the same ballot - an example being an election like what we will see in 2024, which includes municipal elections, all the way to presidential elections. **I also believe that an inconsistency would confuse voters about how to fill out their ballots for each election, possibly risking that the voter incorrectly filled out their ballot, thus their ballot being voided.** I also strongly urge the committee, similar to what I said previously, that language regarding the implementation of RCV be thought out carefully, to ensure that voters, across all demographics, are properly informed and educated about the change and the benefits of RCV, using the data used by subject-matter experts testifying today. I believe that this should include proper education of poll-workers to ensure that voters are able to properly fill-out their ballots. Lastly, I support H.B. 5712 to perhaps further inform the language of RCV in the context of how it will impact voting in the State of Connecticut, so that we are not solely relying on data from other states that have implemented RCV. In order to allow such study to be conducted, I encourage the Committee to pass any legislation enacting RCV within a year following the 2024 election, perhaps 2025 or 2026 to allow for ample time to conduct said study.

Bills concerning age when individuals can apply to register to vote in the State of Connecticut:

*Senate Joint Resolution No. 35: RESOLUTION PROPOSING A STATE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO ALLOW INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE ATTAINED THE AGE OF SIXTEEN TO APPLY FOR ADMISSION AS ELECTORS AND TO BE SO ADMITTED UPON ATTAINING THE AGE OF EIGHTEEN - **Support***

In short, as a concept, allowing sixteen-year olds to apply to register to vote upon turning eighteen is something that I strongly support. I encourage the committee to add language on how the State will educate and inform young people if a bill was to be enacted amending the State Constitution to allow this, following the vote on this concept during the 2024 election. I believe that allowing sixteen-year olds, those that are often getting their learner's permits and driver's licenses, to apply to register to vote during this time would help eliminate barriers to voting upon turning eighteen, and would support civic education efforts by K-12 schools in preparing young people to vote when they are eligible to do so.

—

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and I am happy to discuss this further. Thank you to the committee for taking on this important issue and I urge you to vote in favor of these bills, while also looking carefully at the language included in these bills to ensure implementation matches the framework and intent of these bills.